HOW TO WRITE A VILLAGE HISTORY

By

A. L. HUMPHREYS, F.S.A.

HERTFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

COUNTY LIBRARY

Book No. 191217

Class No. 907

Form L.10.

Form L 31

Hertfordshire County Library.

COUNTY HALL, HERTFORD.

(Telephone : Hertford 3131 Extension 264)

This book should be returned on or before the latest date entered below.

DATE OF RETURN.	DATE OF RETURN.	DATE OF RETURN.

HOW TO WRITE
A VILLAGE HISTORY

HOW TO WRITE A VILLAGE HISTORY

BY

A. L. HUMPHREYS, F.S.A.

A. L. HUMPHREYS
YORK LODGE · READING
1930
~~One~~ Two Shilling net

Printed at The Curwen Press

191217 N
907

NOTE

The following pages are the substance of an Address delivered in the Spring of 1930, at Reading, before the Workers' Educational Association and the Berkshire Archæological Society (including members of the Local History Recording Scheme). The pamphlet is printed by request.

A. L. H.

May 1930

HOW TO WRITE A VILLAGE HISTORY

I am often asked the question: How does one begin to write the history of a village? And to this I give a very plain and direct answer, which is—To begin when you have fallen in love with a village and not before. You can fall in love with a pretty or attractive village just as you can, if you are a man, fall in love with a pretty or attractive woman, or if you are a woman, you can, I understand, fall in love with one of those strong, silent men we hear so much about but rarely see. In other words, the writing of a village history is an entirely high-class love-affair. You want to see your pet village every day just as you wish to see your pretty lady. Do not think you will make money by compiling a village history: most historians live in an attic or cellar, sell matches in the street, and die in the workhouse, but do not despair. The fun of it is simply enormous, and when once you get going it chases cross-word puzzles, the various football competitions and, dare I say it? bridge as well off the field. There may be, and I believe there are, many who think that as the result of investigating village history I ought to look much more moth-eaten even than I do. I am holding out as long as I can.

I hope to persuade you that the investigation of the history of any one of our old villages, and the reconstruction of its past, is one of the most pleasant of pastimes, and one which can be worked at all the year round. It is not the high-brow affair you may think, and at the back of it all lies love of home and country and the healthy desire to know something about them. I presume that most of those who will read this live in Berkshire, and Berkshire is not only itself hoary with antiquity, but it is a county rich for exploration, containing marvellous and mellow villages, and in these days, when it is so easy to reach the shyest and most remote corners of the country by road, there is no difficulty in spying out the land, and in choosing the village about which you wish to know and to write something.

It is, of course, by far the best if you write of your native village, or of one with which you have some family ties. If not your native village, it may be the old home of your wife, or even of your mother-in-law, or your best-loved aunt. Do not mind if it is a very small village, and do not say: 'I am sure this place has no history, because it is so small'. Every village has its history, and it is far better to select one about which little or nothing has so far been written. There is a great advantage, too, in writing of a place which can be reached in an hour or less by road from your own home, because you will have to pay many visits to it. On your first visit take with you a small note-book and pencil, and a flash-lamp. A folding stool or chair on which you can sit or stand may be very useful.

Enter the church and walk slowly round. Do not be vague as to what you wish to see. Ninety-nine people out of every hundred, on entering a church, walk aimlessly round as they do in a museum, and having seen nothing, they depart, knowing no more than when they went in. There is a great difference between staring at a thing and really seeing it. When you enter, concentrate on what you really wish to see. Note first of all (and here your flash-lamp will come in useful, for most churches are dark) the names of those who are commemorated on tablets on the walls. Go up into the chancel and you will probably find monuments to some of the owners of the manor going back for many generations. When looking at the monuments, remember that a place near the high altar was the coveted place for burial, and the chief monuments are usually there; but tombs in churches have been much moved about, and one cannot always be sure what was their original position. The founder of a church or chantry generally had his tomb built into the wall near the altar under a low arch. Look about for other things such as old tiles, an alms-box, an hour-glass, the parish chest, the font, and the bells, with their mottoes or inscriptions. Do not forget to look under the matting on the floor to see what flat slabs are there, and also whom they commemorate. See, too, if there are any memorial windows and painted glass, and possibly there may be some old brasses or even mural paintings on the walls. There is often nowadays a list of the clergy of the parish put up in the porch. All these things are important on your first visit. By this

time the dear old lady who looks after the cleaning of the church will have heard that a stranger is walking round the building; possibly she will be in the church already working, and if so, by all means make friends with her. Listen to her life story as she looks at you ready to burst into tears at any moment. It is a way the charlady has. This is only a trial trip to spy out the land, but first impressions are most important. You are on the right road to get valuable data. You have made a start. Take notes of all you see. Gather sympathy and do not alienate anyone. It is important also to make friends with the parson at an early stage of your pursuit, and if by luck he appears on the scene and no service is about to take place, speak to him and ask if he has a few moments to spare to tell you anything he knows. Be modest and presume that he knows a great deal more than you do. Perhaps he will walk round with you and point out ancient bits of glass still in the windows, or pieces of carved stone from some much earlier building. Listen to and take in all he has to say. Tell him you are making notes upon the history of the church and parish, and that you hope you may count upon his help. Diplomacy is essential with the parson, especially on a first visit. Do not forget that he has the custody of the valuable parish registers and other parish books necessary to your purpose, and that he is entitled to charge fees for making extracts from them; but if you make out a good case he will probably allow you eventually to sit in the vestry or even in his own house to make extracts. The parish chest nearly always contains many other books

and papers besides the actual registers, but as to this I will speak later. Before you say good-bye to the parson on this first visit, propitiate him in every way you can, and when you tell him you intend to come often to the village, look him straight in the eye and see if he appears as though he could bear it. Ask him is there is any special day or hour when he is more free than another to give you a few minutes. Do not try to bounce him into doing anything. Find out from him on this first visit if there is anyone known to him in the village, or out of it, who is specially interested in the history of the place, and to whom you could go for further assistance. Also if he knows of any printed or manuscript accounts of the place. Do not take up too much of his time at first, but when you have parted from him, and used your best smile in so doing, walk round the churchyard alone and look at some of the names of families on the stones. The camp-stool will come in useful. Never mind if the village policeman appears on the scene to ask you questions. Your character will be stainless. The larger tombs in the churchyard with iron railings round are usually those to commemorate some well-known family or some yeoman landowner or prominent resident. Copy the names from as many stones as you can, and note those of families where many succeeding generations of one family are buried. By the time you have completed your first visit, you ought to have reached the starting point of a history, for you will have secured the names on the monuments in the church, which will give you clues to further research. You

will also have the names of the parsons and the patrons of the living from the date when the Bishops' Registers of the diocese begin, and among the list of the parsons there may be some names of those who have become well known as bishops or even archbishops, and you have secured from the churchyard the names of a large number of families who have lived in the parish in past days. If you have any further time to spare on this first visit, look round the church again both inside and out, and note simple things, as the porch, especially the south porch, comparing it with the one on the north side, which is perhaps much plainer. No one but a fool goes into a church without first inspecting the exterior. Note therefore the porch, the bench tables in the porch, and the saint niche over the entrance. Look at the masonry at the base of the tower, for here Saxon work may often be detected. The door is often an object of interest, with its hinges and ironwork. A Norman hinge, for instance, was made up of a long piece of iron like a sword, with a crescent-shaped guard, the crescent representing the letter 'C' and referring to St. Clement. Later, ironwork on doors became much more elaborate, until the face of the door was covered with the scroll-work and foliage of iron. Put down the name of the saint to whom the church is dedicated. Has the church a tower or a spire? If a tower, is it square, round, or octagonal? Of what stone is the church built? Is there a cross or a lych-gate in the churchyard? Are the pews the original or early ones, or some atrocity of a later date?

That will do to begin with. I am presuming that the

parish you have chosen to adopt for treating historically is in Berkshire, but whatever I may say as to methods in research may be applied to any village in any county. If you have leisure between your first and second visits to the village of your choice, occupy it in looking up what exists already, either manuscript or printed, and for this purpose you must make use of a large library. Bear in mind that the information you get from within the village itself is only a fraction of what exists elsewhere. From the first realize that there are many thousands of books which will help you in one way or another, and which will each contribute something to your story. Do not expect to find them out all at once. They are obscure books in many cases, only a few copies having been printed, and you cannot always easily buy them; but municipal and public library authorities long ago realized that it was a large part of their duty in administering a library to devote special attention to books upon local subjects. Yet, although librarians may help you very considerably, you must work out your own salvation, and at least two-thirds of what you find in print or manuscript relating to your village you must discover by yourself, by zeal and diligence.

Do not be in a hurry. It is remarkable how items will gravitate towards you, and how your history will automatically unfold itself. I will give you an instance or two of what I mean, with regard to the use of books and research generally. There are in the Reading Library, and in most large municipal libraries, separate catalogues of local books, but it is, of course, impossible

for the local catalogue to which I refer to give all the scattered and miscellaneous references which there are in the library to any one place. I believe better and fuller cataloguing of books will prevail in the future, and librarians will see that to catalogue a book as it should be done, it will be necessary to look not only at the title-page but beyond it. I will give you two instances only of what I mean: I could name thousands. One of the best books ever written upon Berkshire is William Hewett's *History of the Hundred of Compton*, issued in 1844. This contains chapters upon many of the ancient villages on the Downs around Ilsley. To catalogue this book properly, each of those villages should have a subject matter entry. The same applies to an excellent book, issued as far back as 1839, and written by Anne Russell, upon the history of Newbury. This book contains, as Hewett's book does, historical sketches of many villages around Newbury, and in many cases it contains the best account we have of them. Each one of these villages historically described by Anne Russell should have an entry in the catalogue, directing searchers to information to be found in its pages. The local catalogues will, of course, give you the titles of any separate books, pamphlets, Acts of Parliament, MSS., etc., but there are a very large number of references which are found in little-known books which relate to the county generally which will help, and it is these which are often elusive and have to be followed up clue by clue. I will take instances from both ends of the county to illustrate what I mean. The first instance is Waltham St. Law-

rence, which lies, as you know, just east of Twyford, and is one of the small group of villages about which very little has ever been printed, though much is known. If nothing has been printed separately in book or in pamphlet form, the catalogue is naturally silent according to cataloguing rules, so we have to look farther for the history of Waltham St. Lawrence, and when we probe a little farther, we shall find that there are documents relating to the place in the Westminster Abbey Records, many also in the Bodleian Library, references in Leland's Itinerary, and in a most wonderful book known as Thomas Hearne's *Diary*, which is an eighteenth-century diary, filled with scraps of history and human touches relating to this little-known part of Berkshire. Hearne was born near there, and all his life kept up his interest in the village.

I will now go to the other end of the county and give another instance of one of those ancient villages which came under monastic domination. I refer to Steventon, which, like Waltham St. Lawrence, has, strange to say, no book printed about its history. Here again a little research tells us that there are a large number of early deeds relating to Steventon in Westminster Abbey, because the Manor of Steventon was in early days appropriated to Westminster Abbey. In the British Museum, and in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, there are also valuable MSS. relating to the same place. I mention these two instances to show that because nothing in the way of clues to the history of many places is yielded up by any existing catalogue of printed material, you must always know that each village has

its history, and that it is only through perseverance and an average degree of intelligence that you will discover your facts. I say again, that it is comparatively little that you will find within the confines of the parish.

Now, before I go farther, I must refer to a book about Berkshire which is a monument of research, and which is a solid help to all writers of village histories. These are the five volumes which have been allotted to Berkshire in the Victoria County History series. The whole scheme of the Victoria County History was a very noble one. Its promoters set forth some thirty years or more ago to write a scholarly outline of the history of every village in the country. It was a great scheme, too vast really. Each county has its separate directorate. Many counties, alas, were never completed, and I fear never will be, but luckily Berkshire has been finished, so that we have in the five volumes to which I refer the first great history of the county. The lines laid down for the execution of this work were on a high plane. There is given in outline in this fine work a history of each parish, and—what is highly important—the sources from which the facts are taken, and these are for the most part sources which have never before been tapped, because they are from unprinted records in the Public Record Office in Fetter Lane. Now read over carefully all that the Victoria County History has to say of your village. It may be only one rather closely-printed page. It will give you what is called the descent of the manor, naming, perhaps, several families and several generations of each, but it will

only give you this in outline, so that there will be plenty to do when you work up the history of the families named, giving their vicissitudes, their intermarriages, and often their eccentricities, vagaries, and frailties. Your notes will now be increasing. To preserve order, write each item on a separate piece of paper of uniform size, and at the top of each piece of paper, on the left hand, put, wherever you know it, a date. You may say: why, if the Victoria County History has done so much, should it be necessary for me to do anything more? The answer to that question is that the Victoria County History is a book compiled by students for students, its value cannot be over-estimated, but the scheme of it was never arranged on popular lines, and it needs to be interpreted and to be made human, and it is this interpretation and filling in of the outlines, together with added touches of humanity, that is necessary to be done. Histories of individual parishes in separate form are always badly wanted, and of course must be more popular than a work in five folio volumes: but naturally each is required in its own way.

Now let us review what you have so far got together regarding your village.

(1) You have the names of the families commemorated on the church monuments, as well as the principal names from the stones in the churchyard.

(2) You have a list of the clergy with their dates of institution and a list of the names of the patrons of the living. This you will have to amplify and annotate later.

(3) You have a few notes upon the architecture of

the church, and you have put down your general impression of it, free of architectural technicalities. Ask an architect to help you later, if necessary. Most good architects are also antiquaries.

(4) You have made friends with the parson, which is very important.

(5) You have broken the news to your wife and family that you have got a new hobby, and that they must try to put up with it. Tell them that it will mean to them that you will often stay in on winter evenings working at it; and on summer evenings you may take them joy-riding to the village of your choice, and turn them happily out to grass while you resume your researches on the spot.

(6) You will have looked up in the local library all the references you could find to your village in printed or manuscript sources, and in doing so you will come across footnotes referring to other books, and you will often say to yourself: 'Hullo, what is this book I see spoken of? It will probably tell me just what I want. I must hunt it down, and get from it what I can.' That is the great joy of working with books. You go on learning something fresh every day.

It is now about time that you kept your appointment with the parson to pay him a second visit. It is as well to write a nice, polite note beforehand to say you are coming. Monday will probably be his best day. When you see him, tell him at once that since you last met him you have made much progress in collecting notes, and that you realize that the history of the parish is one that ought to be written and pub-

lished, and that you are determined to see it through. Tell him this with a note of conviction, and not in any tired voice. There are too many tired people in the world. They are tired with having nothing to do; they lean, but never lift. Next tell him that you are anxious to see the contents of the church chest, and especially the parish registers and the tithe map. In the church chest you may find, besides the registers, quite a lot of other items of value. The registers are, of course, the Registers of Baptisms, Marriages, and Deaths, and they should be—but rarely are—complete from the year 1538. They are written in a variety of handwritings by various incumbents, and the earliest entries may be at first a little difficult to decipher; but a very little patience, and you will be able to read them easily. Note remarks at the beginning where often a parson has inserted something of interest with regard to the book itself.

In the first order to keep registers in every parish, it was omitted to state that the books so kept should be made of parchment leaves, so after ordinary paper had been used for some years it was further ordered, about 1604, that the books should always have parchment for the entries. The result has been that many of the earliest registers were recopied on to parchment and they have been preserved for centuries. The advantage has been very great. Many of the clergy took upon themselves to make use of the registers to enter all sorts of curious happenings, and they did not entirely confine themselves to noting baptisms, marriages, and deaths. The variety of these notes is very entertaining:

accidents, storms, frosts, fires, floods, etc., were often recorded. In the registers of St. Mary's Church, Reading, under date July 1602, there is an entry of a death of a child as follows: 'Richard, son of Richard Edwards; this child was killed by a block that fell upon him, which block was founde by the Coroner's Jury to be guyltie of his death'.

Then there may be in the parish chest the Churchwardens' Accounts of the Parish, printed Acts of Parliament, pamphlets relating to the Civil War, and there will be the tithe map which gives the names of all the fields in the parish, and these names are mostly very ancient names dating back long before the Conquest, giving clues to owners' names centuries ago, and to much besides.

Now you must make up your mind to give up your leisure hours for some weeks to copying, first, extracts from the registers, secondly, extracts from the churchwardens' accounts and other parish books, and thirdly, all the names on the tithe map. This will require lots of patience and perseverance, and great accuracy is needed. Although the taking of extracts from the registers is the most important, you had better do it last, because the longer you wait to do it, the more you will be familiar with the names of the families who have lived longest in the parish and whose names are most worth extracting. If you do it first you will probably find that you will need to have a second go at it, because you will realize that you have omitted to extract the names of members of families who have lived for centuries in the place, and

who have probably done much for agriculture or industry of some kind. At this point I wish to urge the importance of realizing two things: (1) that the essential points of any parish gravitate round and start from the church: we must remember that the daily life of our forefathers was dominated by the church. There were no schools or hospitals, and very little literature, except in connection with the church. From the mural paintings and the coloured glass in the church, most folk learned all they knew of the inspiring golden legends of the past. The drama, too, had its origin in the miracle plays which were acted in monastic schools. (2) that the ultimate object of writing the history of any parish is to find out who were the men and women who lived there in days gone by, what they did, where they lived, and, whenever possible, what they looked like. The only instance I know of in which this picture of former inhabitants is done, and done well, is in the remarkable book by Richard Gough, who was born in 1634, lived as a boy through the troublous times of the Civil War, and died in 1723. He wrote a book upon the parish of Myddle, in Shropshire, such as has never again been produced.

With the idea of pleasing posterity, Gough conceived the brilliant idea of writing down all he knew of his contemporaries. He made a plan of the church which showed where everyone sat, and of each occupant or family he wrote a delightful character-sketch. He first describes the parish itself, and the various objects of interest in it, and he then proceeds to give an intimate and detailed account of all the families

from first-hand knowledge. The results are quaint and most amusing to-day. Gough writes: 'Thomas Jukes was a bauling, bould, confident person; hee often kept company with his betters, but shewed them noe more respecte than if they had beene his equalls or inferiors. Hee was a great bowler, and often bowled with Sir Humphrey Lea att a Bowling Greene on Haremeare Heath, neare the end of the Lea Lane; where hee would make noe more account of Sir Humphrey, than if hee had beene a plow-boy. Hee would ordinaryly tell him hee lyed, and sometymes throw the bowle att his head, and then they parted in wrath. But within few dayes, Sir Humphrey would ride to Newton, and take Jukes with him to the bowles; and if they did not fall out, would take him home and make him drunk. This Thomas Jukes married Margaret, the sister of James Wicherly, of Yorton, of an antient and substantiall family. Hee had ishue by her, Thomas and Michaell, and two daughters, Elizabeth and Alice. Michaell was sett an apprentice in London but, for some misdeameanor, came to an untimely end. Elizabeth marryed one Moses Sharpe, who had a small tenement or cottage, on the side of Leaton Heath; they were pritty rich, and had noe ishue. Alice marryed William Maddox, a weaver in Greensell, who held a small tenement there under the worshipfull family of the Corbets, of Moreton Corebet. Thomas Jukes, the second of that name, was a good ingeniouse person, well skilled in any country affaires.'

Again, here is another picture of the times. Gough says: 'I must not forget John Aston, because many in

the Parish have reason to remember him. Hee was a sort of silly fellow, very idle and much given to ſtealing of poultry and small things. Hee was many times catched in the fact, and sometimes well cajoled by those that would trouble themselves noe further with him. Butt at laſt hee grew unsufferable, and made it his common practice to ſteal henns in the night and bring them to Shrewsbury, where hee had confederates to receive them att any time of night. Hee was att laſt imprisoned and indicted for ſtealing twenty-four cocks and henns. The Judge, seeing him a silly man, told the Jury that the matter of fact was soe fully proved that they muſt finde the prisoner guilty, but they would doe well to consider of the value, and thereupon the Jury found him guilty of fellony to the value of eleven pence, att which the Judge laught heartily and said he was glad to heare that cocks and henns were soe cheap in this country. This made John Aſton more carefull, but hee left not his old trade whoally.'

Gough's book will remain a unique book. He turned the microscope on to his own village two hundred years ago, and the result is admirable.

Topography, which is the subject I am putting before you, is a refined form of geography: it is a minute delineation of a small portion of the earth's surface. The topographer is both historian as well as delineator, and it is this union of history and geography which conſtitutes topography. The local historian has to trace as well as he is able the successive changes through which a place has passed, from its uncultivated ſtate to its being drained and generally

built up. It is not only what has been done in the past, but by whom—who caused the village spire to rise, who were the first owners of land and builders of houses: and it is this piecing together and dovetailing of all the thousand miscellaneous items of history associated with any parish which makes your work fascinating and your history a good one. There is much we can never know, but the amount which can be traced by perseverance and by following up link by link is great and vastly interesting. We know, for instance, very little about who built our churches. Few medieval building contracts or fabric rolls have come down to us. Those who wish to see what do exist may turn to the printed details of the building of Catterick Church in Yorkshire, in 1410, and of Fotheringhay in 1434. I believe that most of our churches were built by local masons. In the Middle Ages the builder was not the agent or instrument to carry out the designs of the architect: he himself was the master-hand. Zeal for architecture in the Middle Ages was a possession of the people generally. When a cathedral or abbey arose in a neighbourhood, as here at Reading, it became a source of inspiration over a large area, and the masons who built the abbey were called into consultation for the design of many a parish church. There was one thing above all that we have as a legacy from the monasteries, and that was that honest work was a fine thing. The Roman and the Teuton had regarded work as the portion of slaves, but the monastic ideal was human brotherhood, and also, that if a man did not work, neither should he eat.

I wish to say here that there is one very special source of information which is of great importance in reconstructing the past of any parish and in assisting us to know intimate details of the lives of individuals which can be got in no other way, and this source is the wills of people of comparatively small property. These wills have been preserved from the fifteenth century onwards, and are kept at Somerset House in London, or else in a local will registry. Those for Berkshire are in Somerset House. During the past forty years much has been done to make them known, and printed calendars have been issued to them which give you clues to the wills of inhabitants of most villages in the kingdom from an early date. These wills give inventories of a man's possessions, and enable you almost to reconstruct him in person. In the search-room at Somerset House they welcome all investigators except those who think themselves entitled to lost millions from supposed ancestors. I say that if you are not able to complete and print your history entirely, at any rate collect together the early wills of as many inhabitants as you can and print them, and you will confer a great benefit upon students generally.

I want to say a few words about the older families in a parish, and how to find out about them. The oldest families in every parish are the old yeomen families: they are tenacious of the soil and they go on from generation to generation. They are the salt of the earth, although they may not very often be in the limelight. It leaves the mind of the ordinary reader cold to hear only of the descent of the manor, and in

connection with this, the pedigrees of the great families. He wants much more to have the chronicles of every-day people, and this the earlier topographers neglected to tell us. We want to know all we can of these old yeoman families. As you pursue your researches, you soon come to the conclusion that they are the folk who are the backbone of the history of any parish.

The village historian to-day will find a vast stock of material at hand where there exist the early accounts of churchwardens. I have already alluded to them. The value of early churchwardens' accounts lies in the light they shed upon the fabric of the church, and they reveal the pride taken by the parish in keeping the church in good repair; and there is much charm in the artless way information is conveyed in the entries. In Charles Kerry's book upon St. Lawrence's Church in Reading, there are some early churchwardens' accounts printed. At St. Lawrence's it was apparently decided about 1520 that all women taking seats in the church were to pay sixpence each, except in certain aisles, where they were to pay fourpence; and the only exception to this was the mayor's wife. There is a rather pathetic entry under date 1520 in these St. Lawrence's accounts, which begins: 'Item: of my lord for his moders sete iiiid'. By 'my lord' is signified the Lord Abbot of Reading Abbey, and at this time (1520) that high spiritual office was held by Hugh Faringdon. It is of interest to note that he put his mother into the cheap fourpenny seats. There seems to be a sort of Woolworth touch about these prices for seats: nothing above sixpence. These accounts also make it clear how

important each parish found it to pay for the destruction of polecats, hedgehogs, sparrows, and moles as vermin. In the churchwardens' accounts you will find how national victories were proclaimed on church bells, and how free was the consumption of ale at the parish expense. There are, or should be, in every parish, the overseers' accounts, giving details of poor relief granted at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. We get from these accounts, among other things, the cost of wearing apparel in those days, and the prices of food, and very often the fact that pauperism was conveniently hereditary in some families. There should be as well constables' accounts, relating to petty offences, and surveyors' accounts, giving the costs of maintaining the highways.

Principally for the sake of system and order in compiling your book, it is necessary to keep certain sharp divisions in mind when writing your narrative. There are landmarks of history which are specially important to the local historian to get clearly into his head, and as his notes accumulate, he will be able to classify them under the right headings, and these main headings are: (1) what happened before Domesday: and under this heading there may be relics of the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages, or there may be ancient burial places, camps, entrenchments, ancient roads, coins. Make the most of all you can find under this heading. Remember, too, that there were five old main roads used by the British before the Conquest: (*a*) the Watling Street, starting from Richborough, Kent, and going *via* London to Worcester and to Wales; (*b*) the Icknield Street, from

the Wash in the eastern counties, proceeding by Newmarket and Dunstable to Streatley in Berkshire, where it divided, one branch going to Amesbury by the Ridgeway, and the other to Dorchester, and so on; (*c*) the Akeman Street, from the eastern counties to Bedford, Buckingham, Cirencester to St. David's; (*d*) the Ryknield Street, from Northumberland through Aldborough in Yorkshire, Tewkesbury, Gloucester to St. David's; (*e*) the Ermine Street, from Scotland by Berwick to Catterick, where it divided, and still corresponds to the two branches of our Great North Road.

If your village lies on the route of any of these five roads, you may be lucky in discovering relics of great interest, but with regard to times before Domesday, there is no use in disguising the fact that what we know is fragmentary, and cannot be treated of in any consecutive narrative. It is marvellous how much has been found out, and how much more will be found out, but the blanks must always be admitted to be great, and it is no use guessing or 'talking through your hat'.

We now come to Domesday itself, which was completed in 1086. Domesday is a priceless relic of the introduction of the feudal system into England. The number of tenants in each manor is given; it gives the amount of arable, pasture and wood land; the existence of a big house, if the lord had already erected one; the existence of a mill or of a church. By means of Domesday we know more of the state of England just after the Conquest than we do for centuries afterwards.

Domesday is the noblest monument of its kind which any nation possesses, and it remains in its perfect state to-day.

The next main landmark which is important for the local historian is one to which I have already referred. It is the compulsory keeping of a register by every parson of the parish over which he presided. The order for the keeping of a parish register was made by Thomas Cromwell in 1538, and from that date onwards it was necessary for the parson to enter all baptisms, marriages, and deaths. In a certain number of parishes these records are complete, but in other places they have periods when they are missing or irregularly kept. Not only are the parish registers of great value in tracing family history, but in a large number of cases they record, as I have already said, titbits of local history. A collection of these choice bits of history makes excellent reading, and it makes us wish that Thomas Cromwell had ordained as well that every parson or some specially-appointed person should chronicle the everyday doings of each village in the same systematic way as births, marriages and deaths were recorded. Such diaries would have contributed much to our amusement and our instruction. Sometimes it occurred to a parson in early days to keep a record of happenings. Thomas Botelar, vicar of Much Wenlock, kept a diary of his incumbency which the Shropshire Archæological Society has printed, and there is a commonplace book of the rector of Clayworth, in Nottinghamshire, relating to an early period of history.

But before I go any farther, I am sure you will be saying: 'What happened in my village, and who were the people living there between the two landmarks named—the Domesday survey in 1086, and 1538, the date when parish registers were started?'

In order to answer this very important question I shall have for a moment to tell you that if your work is to avoid being superficial, and to bear the stamp of original research, it must contain details which can only be got by ferreting for them in the Record Office in London, and it is only by so doing that you will be able to fill in the blanks between Domesday and 1538. The value of a local history depends upon the use you can make of original records. You may, of course, have been lucky in finding 'Court Rolls' of the manor, either in the muniment room of the lord of the manor, or at his solicitor's office, or in London; but even then it is not likely that they will go back much before the reign of Queen Elizabeth, nor, if they are in the hands of the lord of the manor, is it certain that you will be allowed to see them. Lords of manors, especially those in monastic hands, began at an early period to keep a record of proceedings in their courts, but few go back with completeness as far as Henry III, so we must find other sources and search in the Public Record Office, which contains official documents of various departments of the central Government, which documents, by the wisdom of our ancestors, have been preserved for reference. It would be quite impossible in the limits of this Address to deal with a fraction of all you may find in the Public

Record Office relating to your particular village, but it would be very remiss on my part to omit to refer at all to these documents, simply because they are not quite as accessible or as readable as other materials which lie at one's elbow and within reach. If there is a more unpopular word than tax, it is tax-collector, and I am sorry to allude to either of them; but many of these very early documents have to do with taxes and tax-collectors. Our interest in them to-day is because in almost all cases they are the only means we have of knowing the names of the people who lived in our villages in the earliest times, and their position is arrived at from the amount for which they were assessed.

The most important of all these documents are what are called the 'Pipe Rolls'. They are the budgets and balance sheets of ancient Chancellors of the Exchequer. They comprise, besides much else of great value, yearly accounts of all the taxes collected in the different counties, and they contain records from the reign of Henry II onwards. The explanation of the name 'Pipe Roll' has never been satisfactorily given, but one writer says that the origin is as follows: 'For as water is conveyed from many fountains and springs by a pipe into the cistern of a house, and from thence into several rooms, so this gold and silver stream is drawn from several courts and collected into one pipe and by that conveyed into the cistern of His Majesty's receipt.'

Other documents are called 'Close Rolls' and 'Patent Rolls'. These, however, were not connected with taxes. Close Rolls contain a vast number of miscellaneous

entries of great interest, such as proclamations for suppressing riots, orders to sheriffs, etc. They begin about 1204, and relate to places all over the country. The Patent Rolls begin in 1201, and contain grants of land, licences to hold fairs and markets, appointments of clergy, abbots, etc. The Close Rolls were so called because they were letters closed or sealed up, and directed to individuals, whereas the Patent Rolls were open for every one to read and take notice of. Calendars of many of these have been printed. There are also early taxation lists known as Lay Subsidies. This was a tax which came into operation about the reign of Richard II, and was not imposed directly on property, but on persons according to the reputed value of their estates. They have been arranged in counties, where one can find the names of householders in various parishes, and in this lies their particular value.

Even at the risk of tiring you, I must name three other classes of records, not to do with early taxation, which are of the utmost importance in the matter of the transfer of land. What are known by the name of the Feet of Fines are documents covering an unbroken period of over six centuries, and no other country has anything parallel with them. They begin in the reign of Richard I, and continue unbroken to 1834. The word 'fines' here used is from 'finis', and denoted the end of a contract, and the 'foot of the fine', which was the official summary of the agreement, was cut off, and retained by the Court. Hence the term 'Feet of Fines'. Feet of Fines are the best illustration of medieval conveyancing.

Another important class of documents are the Inquisitions or inquiries which were made when a tenant of substance died in any parish. Inquiry was then made by government officials as to what land the dead man died possessed of, and who, and how old was his heir, and was he sound in mind and body. These Inquisitions run from Henry III to Charles II.

The last class I would name of these early documents are the Coroners' Rolls. These are of great value and great interest, because they give accounts of strange crimes committed, horrible murders and brutal conduct on the part of villagers. Anyone who doubts that we have progressed in civilization should study these local village records in the Coroners' Rolls. Some of these are printed or partly printed, and when not printed there are often manuscript indexes or arrangements under counties, which are a great help to the local historian. As your collection of data progresses, you will find you are accumulating a heap of miscellaneous items that are curious, but possess points which make them worth preserving, though possibly at first sight they are difficult to classify. There will be cases of local superstitions about animals and birds, cases of witchcraft, ghosts, charms, obsolete punishments, people put in the stocks, local sayings and ballads, beliefs about births, weddings and funerals, details of fairs and revels, local sports and feasts, eccentric characters, dialect and word-lore peculiar to the neighbourhood. All these items are now classed as folk-lore. Their interest and, in most cases, their antiquity were established long ago, and old eighteenth-

century magazines, such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*, gathered together a mass of them relating to places all over the country. Hone, in his *Everyday Book and Table Book*, and Brand, in his *Popular Antiquities*, recorded a very large number. In 1846, a well-known writer and scholar, called W. J. Thoms, found a word that described the lot, and he invented the word 'folk-lore': the lore of the people. Since then, in 1878, a Folk Lore Society was started which has, in a series of important volumes which it has issued, made a science of folk-lore. Every local history should have a section dealing with this subject. I rather distrust information from oldest inhabitants, but under this heading they can often contribute useful items; and in connection with folk-lore, when you get hold of the tithe map and copy the names of the fields, you will often find, interwoven with the names given, those of burial-places, gibbets, ancient quarries, and names of families.

The Local History Recording Scheme has just sent out the fourth edition of its Notes for Local Correspondents, which compresses into a slender but most valuable pamphlet a wealth of suggestions most helpful in furthering the work of the Society. The pamphlet covers a wide field. Several headings emphasized therein are of significance to students of local history. I refer particularly to the importance placed upon securing lists of place-names, inventories of books and papers in parish chests, and monumental inscriptions. The work of the Society could be further extended by making inventories of historical articles in each village, and having them photographed: such as old

musical instruments, samplers and needlework pictures, ox-yokes, flails, shepherds' crooks, wagon bells, poke bonnets, smocks, cricketers' top hats, pillion saddles, and things of everyday use in days long gone by. These should not only be listed: they should be gathered together in a room as a village museum. Then there might be provided for each parish a list of the earliest mention of present-day names of places and families, and genealogical details from old family Bibles should always be preserved. The intelligence of the oldest inhabitant is not always as great as it should be, nor as it is alleged to be. No oldest inhabitant is ever as wise as he looks, nor as wise as he thinks he is. It is often possible to get fuller information from those who are actively engaged in visiting a great many houses, such as chimney sweeps, hawkers, tinkers, and besom makers. Nothing I could say would be too great praise for the Local History Recording Scheme, which owes so much to Mr. Willcocks, and to Miss Swadling as his understudy. What is now wanted is more enthusiasm and fresh recruits as local correspondents in each village.

You will have to include a biographical section, which will give details of the lives of all notable men and women who have been born or who have lived in the parish. You must also provide notes upon lists of the clergy, for instance. It is fortunate that the Matriculation registers of all the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge have been printed from the sixteenth century onwards. With regard to Berkshire clergy, one may say that about ninety per cent of those in

this diocese were Oxford men. Their dates of birth, and often their parentage, can be found without difficulty in the printed register of which I speak. This printed register is known as the Alumni Oxoniensis, and gives also the college of each man, and most colleges, both at Oxford and Cambridge, have printed as full details as are available of the academic and subsequent careers of their students and fellows. A well-behaved curate may sometimes, and indeed, often does, blossom out into a dean or a bishop with gaiters and a shovel hat. His life gets written, his letters are printed, with the result that many sidelights are thrown upon the village where he first worked. Dean Burgon, for instance, in his earlier years held the living of East Ilsley, on the downs, and his letters are descriptive of the place and its remoteness before the days of motor cars. Bishop Fraser was at one time at Ufton Nervet, near Burghfield, and, I believe, kept a diary of his life there. A very notable case is that of the eminent cleric and wit, Sydney Smith, who, when at Combe Florey, in Somersetshire, kept a record of minor happenings which throws priceless sidelights upon life in that remote west-country village, and all of this is printed in his *Life*, by his daughter, Lady Holland.

There is a lovely village near here called Bucklebury, in the history of which I have, for some years, taken an interest. In the eighteenth century there was a curate there, called Richard Radcliffe. I was in despair how to discover anything personal about him. I had a record of his academic career, and there it ended, when I suddenly came across, in a catalogue, a book

called *Letters of Radcliffe and James*. This proved to be my particular Richard Radcliffe, and many of the letters were dated from and descriptive of Bucklebury, and James proved to be the parson at Stanford Dingley, close by.

Of the yeoman families, when you come to deal with them in the biographical section, you will have to glean far and wide from wills, memorial stones, parish registers, and a hundred other sources, and then piece together all you can find out.

I have many times found that when an ancient family holding some small landed property has died out in a village they pop up again in the nearest large town or large village, and if you follow them up clue by clue, it is remarkable how much can be discovered.

I have so far said nothing about the Nonconformists. Supposing you are anxious to trace a Nonconformist family, I had better say that with the exception of the Friends or Quakers, the records of Nonconformist bodies are not so regularly kept or so ancient as the Church people, but it is well to know that all registers of Dissenters which were in existence up to the year 1837, when the General Registration Act came into force, are now kept at Somerset House.

There are a few Don'ts which I want to put before you.

1. Don't assert that your church is of earlier date than St. Martin's at Canterbury, or that it is founded on a Roman Temple, unless you are quite sure.

2. Don't use grand language. Use simple words and abstain from moral reflections.

3. Don't use the words or phrases: 'perhaps', 'not inconceivably', 'we may well suppose that'. It is your business to chronicle facts without embroidering on them.

4. Don't write up any special family at the expense of others.

5. Don't butter up the 'swells'. The smaller landed farmers and others are far more worth writing about.

6. Don't abuse the Dissenting chapel because it is not beautiful to look at. Don't abuse anything.

7. Don't guess. Realize that there is much which we cannot ever know for certain.

8. Don't lose heart, when I say that unless you have searched (i) Public Record Office; (ii) British Museum; (iii) The Bodleian; (iv) the local Museum; (v) the local Library; (vi) the Parish Chest in the Church and all its contents; (vii) the Wills at Somerset House; (viii) the Historical MSS. Commission Reports; (ix) any local Private Collection of Muniments; (x) the county Archæological Society's Proceedings; (xi) the earliest local newspapers; (xii) the Local History Recording System started by my friend, Mr. Willcocks; (xiii) certain Government Blue Books such as Charity Reports, Reports of Market Rights and Tolls: I say, until you have looked through all these carefully your work will not have been done as it should be done. But I want also to say that almost any printed record of a village history, provided that it is carefully and accurately put together, is better than none. It is not everyone who can give up time and money to compiling a local history upon the lines that I have

suggested. The great satisfaction which comes when putting together a village history, is to find, as you progress, how facts dovetail in with one another, until the whole narrative emerges, clear, compact and concrete, and becomes surrounded by memories and traditions associated with the poetry and emotions of the home. Furthermore, you visualize the people about whom you are writing, and see them walking about.

I want to put before you a few specimens of local histories of an unpretentious kind, each of which is very good in its own way. I am beginning with the very simplest form I have on my shelves. It is called A Brief Description of Little Baddow Church, 1927. It is issued for 4d. It was published anonymously, which I think is a pity, but this must be put down to modesty on the part of the writer, who is evidently the parson. It might, without much extra cost, have had an illustration, a list of the rectors, which the writer says he has already in the church, and have given the names of the families recorded on the monuments. At any rate, he has achieved a modest beginning, and his pamphlet is a beautiful specimen of printing and on good paper. It is deserving of all encouragement and is, I think, the simplest and briefest bit of local history I have met with.

The next little book I have is unpretentious in appearance, but very well done. It is an account of the village of Thurlestone, in Devon. Without any great show of learning, it embodies much careful research. It has fourteen illustrations, and its cost is two shillings and sixpence. The author deals with

both church and parish, and has included quite a good index. The fact that his funds would not run to a cloth cover need not go against it. It represents a lot of labour, probably all his own. It is not too well printed, but one has to cut one's coat according to one's cloth.

The next specimen is a pamphlet history of the parish of Earlham, near Norwich, by Walter Rye. This is almost a model monograph upon a parish. It is done by a skilled antiquary who knew almost better than anyone where to go for his information. It might with advantage have had extracts from the parish registers, but I suppose the limits of space prevented this.

One of the best books upon a parish ever published relates to the parish of St. Lawrence, Reading. The muniments of this parish are very full and very ancient, and when the Rev. Charles Kerry, the author, published this book, its great value was seen at once.

The principal chapters of your book will probably shape themselves as follows, but there may be some special features or episodes upon which you may wish to enlarge.

Chapter I. Prehistoric period, including geology.
" II. Place names, including field names.
" III. Manorial history (pre-Reformation history).
" IV. Church history and description.
" V. Biographies.
" VI. Wills.
" VII. Folk-lore.
" VIII. Bibliography.
" IX. Index.
" X. Map.

With the cost of printing what it now is, you may find it difficult to get a publisher to print and publish your book at his own expense, but if you are able yourself to get promises of support beforehand up to a considerable number of copies, this will help you to get the publisher to relieve you of the cost. Sometimes, too, the county Archæological Society is willing to take your book off your hands and print a few copies separately in book or pamphlet form, while the type is set up for their own Proceedings. If the worst comes to the worst, get two or three copies typewritten on one side of the paper only, and hold on to them. Use one of them for the making of additions. Sometimes the local newspaper will assist you with printing.

If you join those who have written of English villages, of their history, their unequalled beauty and their mellowness, you will be in a goodly throng. You will be in company with John Leland, the father of all English topographers, who, with a fine imagination stirring his poetic soul, produced sparks which inflamed the mind of a great poet, Michael Drayton, and caused him to produce his *Polyolbion*, made John Camden write his *Britannia*, and John Stow, the tailor, of London, spend his leisure in making his priceless Survey of London in Elizabethan times. For reasons of time and space I jump over a great gap from Leland's day to the year 1789, when a work of genius was produced relating to a village now famous. In that year Gilbert White, the parson of Selborne in Hampshire, produced the *Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*. White was a prince among observers,

always observing the right thing in the right way, with a complete absence of self-importance and self-consciousness. Love of the work turned him on to this job, and the honesty of his mind kept him true to the performance of it.

I might discourse much longer upon the charm of the village as displayed by writers of genius: the poet Gray with his *Elegy* of deathless fame, and Goldsmith with his *Deserted Village*. There are many others in English literature who have made villages their theme and their study. There is one great lady who often walked our Berkshire roads: I mean Miss Mitford, who in her own inimitable way has made Three Mile Cross immortal in *Our Village*, and her sketches of village folk glow with bright sunshine, such as is only found in inspired writers. It is not all who can write as these great writers have done, with a fine imagination and love of beauty. Less inspired writers are wanted. The love of history is a stimulus, but it need not be the only one. There is no more important influence on national life than the life of the rural worker, and no more important home than his or her cottage, so the subject is a fine one, and I beg you to become a recruit. Behind our country villages lie more than fifteen centuries of history. Will there not be young men who will make it their peculiar delight to remember the days of old, to consider the years of many generations, to ask their fathers what they can tell, and their elders what they can declare unto them, and in all of this to be guided by a love of truth, a love of beauty, and a great love for their own country.

LIST OF BOOKS RECOMMENDED

Giuseppi (*M. S.*). Guide to the Manuscripts preserved in the Public Record Office, London. 2 vols. 1923–4.

Thompson (*A. H.*). Parish History and Records. 1926.

Sims (*Richard*). Manual for the Genealogist, Topographer, and Antiquary. 1888.

Peake (*H.*). The English Village. 1922.

Gross (*Charles*). Sources and Literature of English History. 2nd edition. 1915.

Wake (*Joan*). How to Compile a History and Present-day Record of Village Life. 1925.

Cox (*J. C.*). How to Write the History of a Parish. 1909.

Thompson (*A. H.*). Historical Growth of the English Parish Church. 1911.

Armitage (*E. S.*). An Introduction to English Antiquities. 1903.

Lamborn (*E. A. G.*). The English Parish Church. 1929.

Journal of the Ministry of Agriculture. October 1922. (Contains article on 'A Village History Exhibition as an Educational Factor'.)

Rye (*Walter*). Records and Record Searching. 2nd edition. 1897.

Phillimore (*W. P. W.*). The Parish Historian. 1905.

KU-383-983